

# *The Roman Catholic Bishops of Limerick and Clonfert*

ON

## Boycotting and the Plan of Campaign.

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THE following passages occur in a letter addressed by the Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, Catholic Bishop of Limerick, to the *Freeman's Journal*, 20th December, 1887 :—

"When I am called a 'landlord bishop,' I may ask on what grounds. The implication is that as between the farmers and the landlords, for the last few years, I have taken the side of the landlords. That accusation is as false as the rest, and made at a moment of intense feeling on the part of the people, it is more malicious. I have never sided with the landlords. I have never yet said or written one word as against my people. My whole life as a priest has been spent in Limerick, and I confidently appeal to my fellow-citizens if they ever knew me to take one step against the farmers in the whole course of this agitation. At our last diocesan conference in the month of October, before I ever imagined that I should be dragged before the public in this way, I spoke to my priests, fully and confidentially, as to the course of action they should pursue. I told them that in my opinion they were bound by way of obligation now more than ever to stand by their people, and to show their sympathy in the difficulties of the situation. I said that I regarded the agitation in its substantial objects of self-government and the radical reform of the land system as legitimate and just in the main, and that so long as they were sought by methods in accordance with the law of God, that, so far from restraining the priests or the people, they had my heartiest approval. But, sir, as I am put to it, I will add what I added for my priests. I had hoped that as regards those points on which my conscientious convictions were not in accord with those of others, equally and indeed better entitled to speak with authority, that I might have been allowed simply to remain silent. Where I could not go with the people I made up my mind at any rate not to join their enemies and mine, and therefore I resolved as long as I was allowed to do so simply to stand aside. Now I am compelled to speak and publish the views that I put before my clergy. While I gave my approval to the land agitation, I told them that there were certain methods connected with it that I considered irreligious. I mentioned boycotting. I held that with an excitable people like ours that you cannot mark a man out to be 'boycotted' without a terrible risk of crime, even the crime of murder, and therefore that however defensible theoretically, in practice it was always sinful. And I added that whatever might be thought of it amongst laymen, that as between a priest and his own flock, whose salvation might depend on his sacred and confidential ministrations, it would be

absolutely scandalous. I directed them then on no account to be parties to the 'boycotting' of any man. I am convinced also, although I had no need then to refer to it, that the 'Plan of Campaign' is unjust, and that in the last resource its only sanction is violent resistance to the law. I observed, too, that arising out of the Plan of Campaign there has been developed a system of violent agitation, in which the people were being gradually drawn into circumstances in which collision between them and the armed forces of the Government would be inevitable, although there might be some difficulty in fixing the responsibility for the immediate outbreak of violence. In all these and other similar ways I thought the guidance of the agitation was not only politically stupid, but morally wrong, and I therefore felt bound conscientiously to stand aloof from it. I appeal to my countrymen for my justification in that course. I do not ask any man to say I am right, but I ask any honest man who believes that without corrupt motive of any kind I came to the conviction that 'boycotting' and the 'Plan of Campaign' and violent resistance to the law were bad and sinful, what was I to do? Was I to stifle my conscience for popularity? Is the applause of the people the highest object in life? Am I, a Catholic Bishop, to be allowed to form my own opinions, or must I suppress my own judgment as if I were the paid creature of a political organisation? On the other hand, I could not, and I would not, join the enemies of the people. Even though the methods by which the people worked were wrong they were in a rough way, and looking at the whole thing largely, getting no more than justice. Was it not fair, then, for me to say to my priests—Go with your people; stand between them and oppression; never desert them, but at the same time keep yourselves, and as far as your influence goes keep your people within God's law? That is the position which I have taken up. I am no intriguer. What I do, I do in the light of day, and no vituperation will, I trust, make me false to myself and to my sacred office."

THE following day, 21st December, 1887, the most Rev. Dr. Healy, Coadjutor Bishop of Clonfert, addressed the following to the *Freeman* :—

"Sir,—I read your article and extract from the *Pall Mall Gazette* on Saturday. I have just now read the able letter of the Bishop of Limerick, with whom I had the honour of being bracketed. I have only time to say by telegraph what, however, is quite enough, that with every word of that letter, I entirely agree."



